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14. ABSTRACT

Within the past decade, both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) have undergone considerable transformation. The Navy has shifted its focus from a Mahanian, fleet on fleet, blue water engagement to the brown waters of the littorals. Since receiving the designation as the lead Combatant Command for synchronizing, planning, and executing worldwide operations in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has increased its capacity to become rapidly deployable, agile, flexible, and tailorable to perform the most demanding and sensitive missions. In both cases, the operational utility of the helicopter operating "from the sea" has increased significantly. Guided by SOF theory and doctrine, influenced by the current and future threat environment, and molded after the combat-proven, habitual relationship formed between Navy helicopter squadrons and Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) forces during the Vietnam War; the Navy should designate specific rotary wing assets as SOF under the guidance of Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWAR). With a legitimate, dedicated naval helicopter SOF asset, NAVSPECWAR can maximize SOF training and operational missions in support of the Operational Commander's time-critical mission requirements. Implementation of this recommendation will ensure a truly joint SOF aviation capability, increase the supply of high demand, low density SOF rotary wing assets, and dramatically improve the operational effectiveness of SOF operations.

15. SUBJECT TERMS

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NAVY ROTARY WING SOF : IMPLICATIONS FOR THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Contents

Abstract

Within the past decade, both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) have undergone considerable transformation. The Navy has shifted its focus from a Mahanian, fleet on fleet, blue water engagement to the brown waters of the littorals. Since receiving the designation as the lead Combatant Command for synchronizing, planning, and executing worldwide operations in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has increased its capacity to become rapidly deployable, agile, flexible, and tailorable to perform the most demanding and sensitive missions. In both cases, the operational utility of the helicopter operating "from the sea" has increased significantly. Guided by SOF theory and doctrine, influenced by the current and future threat environment, and molded after the combat-proven, habitual relationship formed between Navy helicopter squadrons and Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) forces during the Vietnam War; the Navy should designate specific rotary wing assets as SOF under the guidance of Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWAR). With a legitimate, dedicated naval helicopter SOF asset, NAVSPECWAR can maximize SOF training and operational missions in support of the Operational Commander's time-critical mission requirements. Implementation of this recommendation will ensure a truly joint SOF aviation capability, increase the supply of high demand, low density SOF rotary wing assets, and dramatically improve the operational effectiveness of SOF operations.

Introduction

> *Ninety percent of the world's commerce travels by sea, the vast majority of the world's population lives within a few hundred miles of the oceans, and nearly three quarters of the planet is covered by water.*
>
> *–Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*

As the U.S. Navy continues to evolve from its Cold War strategic mindset to the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), the Mahanian canon of a decisive fleet engagement on the high seas appears to be in the distant past. Instead, it looks as if the future battlefield will occur in the littoral waters to counter the land and sea based forces of a potential asymmetrical adversary who will avoid competing head-on against current U.S. strengths. To prepare for future military challenges ranging from the brown water to two hundred miles inland, naval transformation has included such innovations as the founding of the Navy Expeditionary Combat Command (NECC), the procurement of the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS), the establishment of three Riverine Squadrons, and the usage of new naval formations such as the Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG).[1]

As the lead Combatant Commander for synchronizing, planning, and executing worldwide operations in the GWOT, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has also experienced major transformation with a focus on the littorals. USSOCOM improved its maritime capabilities with the establishment of the Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) and the addition of the Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crewman (SWCC) within Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWAR).[2] These assets will enhance Special Operations Forces (SOF) in combating littoral adversaries.

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[1] Ronald O'Rourke, *Naval Transformation*, CRS-3.
[2] Andrew Feickert, *U.S. Special Operations Forces*, CRS-5.

Due to the dramatic emergence of irregular warfare operations throughout the world, utilization of SOF is at an all-time premium. Despite the recent interest in the conduct of operations in the littoral environment and the increased demand on NAVSPECWAR, no organic, maritime aviation SOF assets exist to support SOF goals and mission requirements. Assets from the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) or the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) currently fill this capacity. If SOF assets are not available due to prioritization of the high-demand, low-density SOF aviation assets in theater, another option entails the utilization of conventional Navy helicopters in a supporting role despite the lack of specialized training. This scenario illustrates a quandary for the joint force commander as the integration of the factors of time, space, and force must be carefully balanced against the risk of mission failure.

This paper analyzes the participation of helicopters operating from the sea while conducting special operations and posits a requirement to designate a Naval Aviation Special Operations Force (NASOF) to successfully meet time-critical maritime strategic and operational objectives. NASOF assets would arguably increase the capabilities available to the Operational Commander through the augmentation of all six of the joint functions – intelligence, protection, fires, movement and maneuver, command and control, and sustainment. As a roadmap towards accomplishment of this contention, this paper will briefly examine the historical evolution of the relationship between Navy helicopter squadrons and Sea, Air, and Land (SEAL) teams, highlighting the exclusion of naval aviation assets within NAVSPECWAR and USSOCOM. Building upon this historical context, the paper will examine contemporary SOF theory and doctrine as well as its pertinent application towards current and future threats. Additionally, this paper will illustrate current shortfalls of

particular importance to the Operational Commander through the analysis of applicable SOF aviation case studies conducted in the maritime domain. Finally, this paper will make recommendations on how these deficits can be addressed in order to ensure today's joint force commanders are adequately prepared to effectively conduct maritime SOF operations to achieve theater strategic and operational objectives.

Historical Perspective: Navy Helicopters Supporting Navy SEALs

The enduring relationship between Navy helicopter squadrons and Navy SEALs originated during the Vietnam War. Planners conceived Operation GAME WARDEN in 1965 with the objective of denying the Viet Cong access to the Mekong Delta, the highly populated agricultural region of South Vietnam. As the lead service component, the Navy's goal was to stop infiltration of Viet Cong men and supplies and ensure safe passage of friendly shipping throughout the delta.[3]

The new threat and unusual mission requirement for the Navy affected a change in the operational factor of space. With the alteration of operations from the open ocean to the littorals, the Navy recognized a change in the operational factor of force needed to follow. Newly formed Riverine squadrons, utilizing river patrol boats (PBRs), became the force of choice to fight an enemy with an extensive coastline and intricate system of inland waterways. Navy leadership realized the need for a quick response force after an incident in which the Viet Cong ambushed a group of PBRs.[4] The capability to provide close air support (CAS), insertion, and extraction, would be necessary to increase the operational protection of friendly forces.

[3] Richard C. Knott, *Fire from the Sky,* 4.
[4] David G. Tyler, "Seawolves Roll in Across the Mekong Delta," 46.

The helicopter gunship, operating from both Tank Landing Ships (LSTs) and small airfields, became the platform of choice since no fixed-wing capable runways were in the vicinity.[5] The concept of sea-based operational fires increased the operational reach of attacks on enemy targets. Furthermore, an improvement in operational sustainment complemented the operational reach, enabling freedom of action through the addition of endurance and depth.

The Army initially provided the airborne support, but due to competing Army missions emerging elsewhere in theater, as well as difficulty adapting to the shipboard environment, naval aircrew began training in helicopter gunship tactics and aerial gunnery.[6] The first Navy Special Warfare (NSW) Squadron, Helicopter Light (Attack) Squadron THREE (HAL-3), was commissioned in April 1967.[7] HAL-3 provided rapid-reaction CAS to boat crews and frequently operated with the SEALs. The relationship between HAL-3 and the SEALs maturated to the point where the SEALs became the squadron's primary customer. This newly formed team provided extra operational intelligence and maneuver. HAL-3 inserted and extracted SEAL teams with the task of reconnoitering riverbanks in advance of upcoming PBR missions.[8] While flying more combat missions and earning more awards that any other squadron in Vietnam during four years of combat operations, a solid bond of friendship and mutual respect developed between Navy gunship aircrews and SEALs.[9]

Of the many operational lessons learned during Operation GAME WARDEN, one of particular importance still resonates today: success in the littorals depends not only on

[5] Ibid., 47.
[6] Ibid., 46.
[7] HAL-3 official website, http://www.seawolf.org/history/asp (accessed 24 February 2008).
[8] Richard C. Knott, *Fire from the Sky*, 19.
[9] David G. Tyler, "Seawolves Roll", 49.

SEALs but also on the requisite skills of the support platform operators who deliver them to targets. The addition of the Navy's quick reaction force provided leaders with a supplement to operational functions not previously available. The integration of the innovative functions of operational fires, movement and maneuver, protection, sustainment, and intelligence led to operational success in the Mekong Delta.

As part of the military downsizing after Vietnam, HAL-3 disestablished in 1972. Nearly two decades later, after realizing the need for a specialized unit trained in the special warfare role, the Navy commissioned two squadrons into the reserve component. The squadrons, Helicopter Combat Support Special Squadrons FOUR and FIVE (HCS-4, HCS-5), modeled similar to the framework of HAL-3, specialized in infiltration, exfiltration, resupply, and CAS for joint SOF.[10] Since inception, these two squadrons have been the only Navy squadrons dedicated solely to SOF and Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) support, providing fifty percent of NSW air requirements during the inter-deployment training cycle.[11] Both squadrons mobilized for Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM and Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY to provide CSAR support.[12] Interestingly, despite the solitary primary mission of NSW support, command control of the squadrons resided in Naval Air Reserve vice NAVSPECWAR. Therefore, neither squadron received USSOCOM's vision, doctrinal guidance, resources or oversight.

Both squadrons were mobilized and subsequently allocated to the Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF).[13] However, due to the simultaneous momentum of the long term planning of Active/Reserve

[10] HCS-5 and HSC-84 official websites, www.navyreserve.navy.mil (accessed 24 February 2008).
[11] Allen F. Cantrell "What's in the Future?" 30-32.
[12] HCS-5 and HSC-84 official websites, www.navyreserve.navy.mil (accessed 24 February 2008).
[13] LCDR Christopher Brown, HSC-84 Training Office, e-mail message to author 17 February 2008.

Integration, HCS-5 disestablished in December of 2006. In addition, HSC-4 was re-designated Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron EIGHT FOUR (HSC-84) in October 2006 and subsequently shifted operational control from the reserve to the active component.[14] Despite the new Required Operational Capability/Projected Operational Environment (ROC/POE) associated with the re-designation, HSC-84 remains the only naval aviation squadron assigned ashore in Iraq in support of joint SOF operations. As an attached asset to the Joint Special Operations Air Component (JSOAC), HSC-84 performs direct action and special reconnaissance missions, both core tasks of USSOCOM.[15] After the expiration of the current request for forces in Iraq, the future role of SOF support from HSC-84 is undetermined.[16]

Naval helicopter support for NSW has not been restricted to HSC-84; active component HSC and Helicopter Anti-Submarine (HS) squadrons consider NSW as one of their primary missions.[17] Helicopter Anti-Submarine Light (HSL) squadrons do not consider NSW a mission-set, but along with HSC and HS squadrons have provided training and operational support to SEALs since Operation DESERT STORM. Performing missions in lieu of USSOCOM assets heavily tasked with other SOF requirements, conventional helicopter squadrons have provided sniper support, command and control, medical evacuation, CSAR, and maritime interdiction operations.[18] Rear Admiral Robert Harward, NSW Task Group Commander during OIF, stated, “Not since the days of Vietnam have the Navy SEALs been afforded the opportunity to work this closely with their naval rotary wing counterparts during wartime.”[19]

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[14] CDR Ed Lizak, Naval Air Reserve Helicopter Program Manager, in telephone call with author, 07 February 2008.
[15] Mark Fitzgerald, “Naval Aviation under the Radar in Iraq.”
[16] Scott Rye, "Red Wolves and Fire Hawks."
[17] See HH-60H, SH-60F, SH-60B, and MH-60S NATOPS Flight Manuals available at https://natec.navy.mil.
[18] John Zerr, "Navy Helos Should Support SEALS," 72-73.
[19] NSWTG CENT message 211028Z March 2003, quoted in John Zerr, “Navy Helos”, 72.

SOF Doctrine, Theory, and Policy

Prior to 1987, the capabilities and equipment required to conduct successful joint special operations were scattered throughout the Services. Acknowledging the negative consequence of the fragmentation, the Nunn-Cohen Act legislation established USSOCOM.[20] USSOCOM's command control of the SOF of each service ensures interoperability through the exclusive oversight of the training, doctrine, and equipping of the forces. Congress recognized that the conventional services resisted the formation of specialized forces for missions of an unconventional nature, and once created, SOF generally stagnated under conventional control. Congress created a major force program (known as MFP-11) as a vehicle to request funding for the development and acquisition of SO-specific equipment, materials, supplies, and services. With control of its own budget, USSOCOM can continually modernize, care, and nurture the force with its own resources.[21] In its *2007 Posture Statement*, USSOCOM lists four principle tenets of SO which preserve the quality and capabilities required for success:

- Humans are more important than hardware
- Quality is better than quantity
- Special operations forces cannot be mass produced
- Competent special operations forces cannot be created after emergencies occur[22]

Beyond these four tenets, specific definitions found in joint doctrine provide a comprehensive explanation that illustrates the purpose of SO and SOF (emphasis added):

> SO: Operations conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to achieve military, diplomatic, informational, and/or economic objectives employing military capabilities for which there is *no broad conventional force requirement*. These operations often require covert, clandestine, or low visibility capabilities. Special operations are applicable across the range of military operations. They can be conducted independently or in conjunction with operations

[20] *USSOCOM Posture Statement 2007,* 1.
[21] Bryan D. Brown, "U.S. Special Operations Command," 38-39.
[22] *USSOCOM Posture Statement 2007,* 1.

> of conventional forces or other government agencies and may include operations through, with, or by indigenous or surrogate forces. *Special operations differ from conventional operations in degree of physical and political risk,* operational techniques, mode of employment, independence from friendly support, and dependence on detailed operational intelligence and indigenous assets.[23]
>
> SOF: small, specially organized units manned by people *carefully selected and trained* to operate under physically demanding and psychologically stressful conditions to accomplish missions using modified equipment and unconventional applications of tactics *against strategic and operational objectives.*[24]

Colin Gray, renowned political scientist and strategic theorist, takes the JP definitions one-step further with the assertion that SO "are operations that regular forces, functioning regularly, cannot perform"[25] and SOF are "selected, equipped, and trained to do what regular forces cannot do."[26] Moreover, Dr. Gray believes SO have tactical, operational, and strategic utility that can contribute to the eventual outcome of a conflict across the range of military operations via two-master claims: economy of force and expansion of choice. Simply stated, SO can achieve significant results with limited forces and can expand the options available to political and military leaders.[27]

SOF can accomplish the following nine core tasks: direct action, special reconnaissance, foreign internal defense, unconventional warfare, counter-terrorism, counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, civil affairs operations, psychological operations, and information operations.[28] Significant attention has been placed on direct action capabilities during the GWOT as SOF attempt to find, fix, and finish the enemy. As one of the core tasks performed through NAVSPECWAR support platforms, direct action has become the Navy SEALs forte. Rear Admiral William McRaven, the prospective

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[23] *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations.* JP 3-05, I-1.
[24] *Joint Special Operations Task Force Operations,* JP 3-05.1, I-1.
[25] Colin S. Gray, *Explorations in Strategy,* 156.
[26] Ibid., 149.
[27] Ibid., 163-174.
[28] JP 3.05, II-3 – II-4.

Commanding Officer of Joint Special Operations Command and author of *Spec Ops*, derived a theory of SO focusing on direct action missions (either strategic or operational in nature) that he considered a success. His theory states that SO are able to succeed if they have a simple plan, carefully concealed, realistically rehearsed, and executed with surprise, speed and purpose. It is his position that if these six principles are taken into account in the planning, preparation, and execution of a mission, they allow SOF to achieve relative superiority over the enemy, and thus greatly increase their chances for success.[29]

Emerging Threats

Today's environment of irregular warfare has state and non-state actors fostering instability and political chaos across numerous geographic regions of the world. With no one common enemy, no country or nation-state to defeat, and universal frontlines for this new war, the traditional concepts of war do not completely apply against this new strategic adversary.

In considering emerging threats, contemplate the political and social instability of the island and archipelago nations of Southeast Asia: Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines.[30] Substantial evidence suggests that the perpetrators of the next terrorist attack against the United States are currently training and refining their skills in this region.[31] Indonesia has a newly established and still fledgling democratic government and the country faces a continuing terrorism threat from the Free Aceh Movement. Islamic terrorist group and Al Qaeda ally, Jemmah Islamiyya, instigates terrorist threats from within Malaysia.[32] Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P), established as part of Operation

[29] See William H. McRaven, *Spec Ops*, 3-28.
[30] See Gary R. Bowen, *Coast Guard SOF*, 6-8.
[31] Rupert Herbert-Burns and Lauren Zucker, "Drawing the Line between Piracy and Maritime Terrorism."
[32] Ibid.

ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) in 2002, assists the Armed Forces of the Philippines in their struggle against radical Islamic factions. Terrorist groups such as the Abu Sayyaf Group, a close ally of Al Qaeda, are extremely active in the southern Philippines.[33] After review, the intelligence suggests the future battlefield in the global counterinsurgency may not be found in the desert but in the littorals.[34]

According to *Jane's Intelligence Review*,

> All the pieces are now in place - nautical skills, personnel, weaponry, firepower, motivation, connections, tactical flair, command and control acumen, and strategic outlook to design a maritime terrorist operation. Thus, something that may first be dismissed as an act of violent piracy in waters distant from US or European shores could evolve into a maritime terrorist attack against a critical and densely-populated Eastern Seaboard urban area complex, a vital Asian trading artery, a Gulf Coast port-located refinery, or a cruise ship two hours into a night passage in the Strait of Florida.[35]

A successful, global counterinsurgency will require defeating and denying sanctuary of existing terrorist organizations worldwide. The types of missions and capabilities mandated by Congress for USSOCOM enable the unconventional, irregular, and adaptive actions that are best suited to engage the global asymmetric threat of terrorist organizations. This undoubtedly led to USSOCOM's designation as the lead combatant commander in the synchronization of the GWOT. With the expectation of relying heavily on SOF forces throughout the Long War, the *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review* mandated:

> SOF will increase their capacity to perform more demanding and specialized tasks, especially long-duration, indirect and clandestine operations in politically sensitive environments and denied areas. For direct action, they will possess an expanded organic ability to locate and track dangerous individuals and other high-value targets globally. SOF will also have greater capacity to detect, locate and render safe WMD.[36]

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[33] Stew Magnuson, "To Counter Terrorism, Philippine Army Takes Lessons from U.S. Forces," 48-49.
[34] Gary R. Bowen, *Coast Guard SOF*, 6.
[35] Rupert Herbert-Burns and Lauren Zucker, "Piracy and Maritime Terrorism."
[36] *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, 44.

As indicated in the *Capstone Concept for Special Operations*, implementation of this plan will allow USSOCOM to provide more SOF capacity to the Geographic Combatant Commanders and allow SOF to maintain a continuous presence in accordance with theater and strategic needs. SOF must be ready to perform direct action operations in uncertain conditions and possibly on a continual basis.[37] Likewise, the Navy's new approach to global presence demands larger numbers of independent naval formations, each with substantial independent combat capability.[38] With a time-critical strategic or operational objective within the area of responsibility of an island nation, it appears natural that SOF and the Navy will be intertwined in implementation of the objective.

Implications for the Operational Commander

> *Due to its complex nature and immense size, the Maritime Domain is particularly susceptible to exploitation and disruption…The United States must deploy the full range of its operational assets and capabilities to prevent the Maritime Domain from being used by terrorists.*
>
> -President George W. Bush
> *National Security Presidential Directive 41*

Given the national strategic aims to "defeat violent extremism as a threat to our way of life as a free and open society; and to create a global environment inhospitable to violent extremists and all who support them,"[39] the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has identified six military strategic objectives to achieve the desired U.S. strategic end-state for the GWOT:

- Deny terrorists what they need to operate and survive
- Enable partner nations to counter terrorism
- Deny weapons of mass destruction proliferation
- Counter state and non-state support for terrorism
- Defeat terrorists and their organizations

[37] *Capstone Concept for Special Operations*, 4-5.
[38] Norman Friedman, *Terrorism, Afghanistan, and America's New Way of War*, 219.
[39] *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism*, 5.

- Contribute to the establishment of conditions that counter ideological support for terrorism[40]

The GWOT campaign plan presents geographic combatant commanders with many obstacles regarding the operational factors of space, time, and force. Staff planners must ensure a precise balance of the operational factors to synchronize the operational functions available. With the declaration of USSOCOM as the lead agent and the subsequent preference of SOF as the "force of choice" in the GWOT, it is of the utmost importance that the Operational Commander understands the implications of the lack of a dedicated maritime aviation SOF asset towards achieving theater objectives.

Current events and cultural and religious trends combine to suggest that creating and maintaining a fixed land base of operations may be problematic in the future. Maximizing the advantage of the vast maneuverable space afforded to sea borne forces, it seems logical that SOF will need to operate from the maritime environment. The Army's Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) has consistently demonstrated it can operate in the maritime environment, both on small decks and aircraft carriers. During Operation EARNEST WILL (1987), the Navy's primary focus remained on the blue water threats. The Army, more inclined to shift towards combating irregular warfare, provided SOAR assets to operate from static barges in the Arabian Gulf to protect the neutral shipping during the Iran-Iraq tanker war.[41] As part of Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY (1994), the SOAR deployed onboard the USS *America*. The plan, never executed due to a last minute political solution during the Haitian crisis, involved SOAR inserting assault forces to secure key

[40] Ibid., 6-7.
[41] John W. Partin, *Special Operations Forces in Operation EARNEST WILL/PRIME CHANCE.*

government sites.[42] At the onset of OEF (2001), USS *Kitty Hawk* deployed with the SOAR embarked to transport the 75th Ranger regiment to operate over Afghanistan.[43]

Utilizing the SOAR does not come without some sacrifice and risk. With limited deck space, the addition of SOAR aircraft will inevitably require the removal of typical Navy aircraft and the conventional mission sets they provide the Joint Forces Maritime Component Commander (JFMCC). Since *Kitty Hawk* deployed without its typical air wing, it offloaded the SOAR and returned to Japan to pick-up its normal complement of aircraft. The round trip resulted in one aircraft carrier being unavailable for conventional operations for almost two months.[44] Furthermore, Operation EARNEST WILL demonstrated Army aircraft are not built to operate at sea, as they lack electromagnetic shielding and have ordnance not considered shipboard capable.[45] During a lengthy period at sea, other problems of interoperability undoubtedly will surface.

Since SOF aviation is at an all time premium, a given task that requires SOF operating from the maritime environment will involve a substantial time lag. This allows planners the necessary time to prioritize and de-conflict land-based tasks and re-qualify or regain proficiency for SOF aircrew in the shipboard environment. In a time critical mission, conventional Navy helicopters could be utilized in lieu of the SOAR or AFSOC assets. Conventional forces can be an enabler in many ways, but as evidenced in Operation EAGLE CLAW (1980), this presents a precarious alternative involving high operational risk to both the mission and the force. In an attempt to rescue American hostages in Iran, eight Navy helicopters piloted by Marine Corps aircrew, launched from USS *Nimitz* in the Indian Ocean.

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[42] Sean Naylor, "The Invasion That Never Was," 12-16.
[43] Norman Friedman, *America's New Way of War*, 161.
[44] Ibid., 161.
[45] David B. Crist, "Joint Special Operations in Support of Earnest Will," 22.

Without the prerequisite specialized training needed for such a demanding skill-set, the mission resulted in total failure.[46]

Since operational command organizations create the framework that assimilates all of the operational functions, it is arguably the most vital of all of the operational functions.[47] One of the challenging aspects of OIF has been the relationship between the Joint Forces Air Component Commander (JFACC) and JSOAC in regards to aviation assets operating within the same battlespace. In adherence to McRaven's theory (see page 8), JSOAC's unique mission and specialized assets often require that it plan and operate in a vacuum.[48] To maximize coordination between the Joint Air Operations Center (JAOC) and the JSOAC, a Special Operations Liaison Element (SOLE) is attached to the JAOC staff to integrate the JSOAC's requirements into the airspace plan. The SOLE provides real time mission support coordination with the JSOAC, with special emphasis on airspace de-confliction.[49] As perplexing as the notional Joint Task Force (JTF) command relationship might appear (see Figure 1),[50] the structure is further complicated when utilizing conventional helicopters to perform a SOF mission. Since the conventional helicopters reside within the operational control of the Carrier Strike Group (CSG) and ESG, the JSOAC cannot task the assets

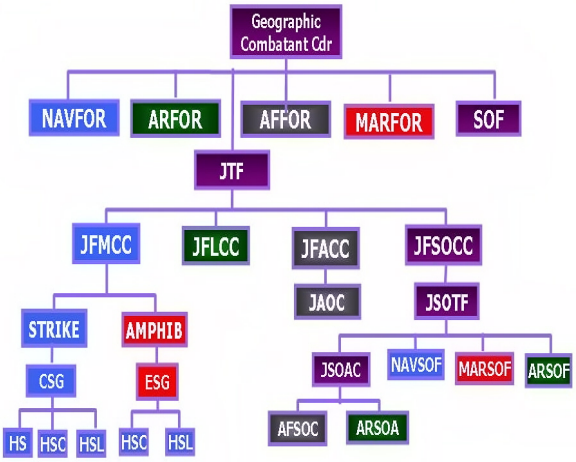

Figure 1: Notional C^2

[46] *Rescue Mission Report.*
[47] Milan N. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare* (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 2007), VIII-20.
[48] Alexander M. Wathen, "The Miracle of Operation Iraqi Freedom Airspace Management."
[49] JP 3-05, III-11
[50] Figure 1 is a notional JTF based on author's interpretation of JP 3-05 *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations* and JP 5-00.2 *Joint Task Force Planning Guidance and Procedures.*

without coordinating through *both* the JFACC *and* the JFMCC. SOF liaison officers (LNO), if available, can be embedded within the command structure in an attempt to ensure the timely exchange of necessary support and operational information.[51]

Due to the cumbersome command and control relationship, judicious operational intelligence is held at a premium to ensure the timely execution of missions. Regardless of the utilization of SOF or conventional helicopter assets in the maritime environment, significant lead-time must be given to the operational planning process so the force can mobilize, train and rehearse for a task that the selected force does not consider its primary mission or foremost operating environment.

The current lack of dedicated maritime aviation SOF complicates the aspect of force, time, and space and potentially impedes the Operational Commander's ability to achieve assigned objectives. As Milan Vego states, "The art of warfare is to obtain and maintain freedom of action – the ability to carry out critically important, multiple, and diverse decisions to accomplish assigned military objectives."[52] Similar to the Vietnam era, the recent shift in threat has significantly changed the adversary's operational factors. This variation has "disturbed the overall balance and requires a reassessment"[53] of U.S. factors.

Recommendations

> *As a declaratory strategy, this document challenges the sea services to evolve an expanded range of integrated capabilities to achieve enduring national strategic objectives.*
>
> *-Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*

SOF aviation assets are a low-density and high-demand force in the GWOT. The SOAR executed more than 1,000 combat air assaults in both Afghanistan and Iraq in 2006,

[51] JP 3-05, III-11
[52] Milan N. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, III-3.
[53] Ibid., III-4.

while simultaneously supporting Army, Navy, and Marine SOF in multiple training exercises.[54] Increasing the inventory and capabilities of USSOCOM specialized rotary wing aircraft remains a priority to project SOF capabilities worldwide.[55]

It has been suggested that a memorandum of agreement (MOA) between NAVSPECWAR and the naval helicopter community could alleviate the burden on USSOCOM aviation assets.[56] The MOA would create a baseline NSW capability for all helicopter aircrew to attain prior to deployment and thus would increase the SOF assets available to the Operational Commander when they arrive in theater.[57] Although on the surface this recommendation has some merit, challenges to maintain SO competency without neglecting existing JFMCC responsibilities would certainly materialize. In addition, baseline training across the entire fleet is contrary to SOF doctrine and creates an unnecessary training and financial burden. The addition of more SOF to the structure cannot be done at the expense of quality and readiness. The successful conduct of SO relies on individual and small unit proficiency in specialized skills applied with adaptability, improvisation, and innovation. Without a dedicated organic force, it is hard to foresee how success conducting maritime SO can be achieved. The Operational Commander must be aware of this potential problem.

Instead, the Navy should designate current expeditionary helicopter squadrons as SOF capable, with NSW as its only primary mission. The designation of NASOF is the key to success; as a single authority, NAVSPECWAR, would be responsible for writing NASOF doctrine, training, and collecting lessons learned. With SEAL teams permanently based in

[54] *USSOCOM Posture Statement 2007*, 9.
[55] Ibid., 20.
[56] See Wes McCall's JMO thesis, "Naval Helicopters and SOF: How Joint Are We?" 16.
[57] Ibid., 16.

Coronado, CA and Little Creek, VA, and helicopter squadrons co-located nearby in North Island, CA and Norfolk, VA, it appears appropriate to incorporate the current habitual relationship into NAVSPECWAR. With an increase in trust and confidence between the operators and its primary customer, NASOF aircrew would have more capacity for potential missions and would provide the SEALs with critical training opportunities while in the U.S.

The SEALs proven ability to operate across the spectrum of conflict and to provide real time intelligence, offers decision makers immediate and virtually unlimited options in the face of rapidly changing crises around the world.[58] The designation of NASOF, combining superior air mobility and fire support platforms, is crucial to sustaining and supporting the high operational tempo of complex SO missions.

Several factors point toward using NASOF in special operations. Although some overlap in capability would exist between NASOF and current SOF aviation assets, the forces are not identical. Further, the scarcity of SOAR assets dictates that they be employed at the high end of their operational spectrum: clandestine, deep-penetration missions for direct action, strategic reconnaissance, and joint targeting that require them to use all of their specialized skills to the utmost of their capabilities. NASOF can fill the gap to deal with the emerging threats in the littorals with the ability to quickly move SEALs to the war's frontlines and beyond.

With its own maritime SOF force, the current command and control dilemma would be simplified, as the JSOAC would have operational control of the NASOF rather than relying on supported, undertrained assets from the JFMCC. Since SO missions tend to

[58] NAVSPECWAR official website, "Missions", https//www.navsoc.navy.mil (assessed 24 March 2008).

require execution on short notice based on the fleeting nature and quick expiration of human intelligence, this streamlined structure is crucial to accomplishment.

Milan Vego asserts that a "high degree of jointness is critical for success"[59] as the "synchronization of the multiservice capabilities achieves the highest synergistic effect."[60] Capitalizing on the multidimensional benefits of a truly joint SO capacity, the designation of a NASOF would diminish the Operational Commanders concerns regarding the factors of time, space, and force within the littoral environment. Given an objective in the littoral environment of an area of operations, maritime SOF would be better trained, proficient and interoperable with the shipboard environment. The joint functions of command and control would be streamlined and timely intelligence demands would be lessened. In addition, utilizing the advantage of historic hindsight of naval helicopter activity during the Vietnam War, the capacity of the joint functions of protection, movement and maneuver, fires, and sustainment would undoubtedly expand.

Conclusion

Due to a dramatic rise in small-scale contingency operations throughout the world, beset as it is by asymmetric threats and ill-defined enemies, utilization for SOF forces is at an all time premium. While history has shown a necessity for dedicated maritime aviation SOF, the Navy has responded with devoted maritime support (SWCC) for NSW forces, while neglecting dedicated aviation support trained to support SOF goals and mission requirements. The Air Force and the Army have recognized the importance of special operations air mobility and capability by permanently creating such units to support overt and clandestine missions of their respective organic SOF units, permitting increased efficiency and efficacy

[59] Milan N. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, III-3
[60] Ibid., III-44.

of these units. The Navy has only made temporary units, disbanding the units after each substantial conflict has been averted. The new environment requires new thinking, new strategies, and new alignments in force structure. Forces of a NASOF component would fill the gap the Operational Commander finds in the balance of time, space, and force. Furthermore, the addition of NASOF would increase the capacity of the operational functions of fires, movement and maneuver, protection, intelligence, sustainment, and command and control. When fully integrated, the highest degree of efficiency and effectiveness will be ensured. While USSOCOM has highly qualified teams that can do this type of work, many more are needed, and they can be made available from the Navy. I hope that the reader will agree that this vision for NASOF is worth consideration.

Abbreviations

AFSOC	Air Force Special Operations Command
CAS	Close Air Support
CSAR	Combat Search and Rescue
CSG	Carrier Strike Group
ESG	Expeditionary Strike Group
GWOT	Global War on Terrorism
HAL	Helicopter Light (Attack) Squadron
HCS	Helicopter Combat Support Special Squadron
HS	Helicopter Anti-Submarine
HSC	Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron
HSL	Helicopter Anti-Submarine (Light)
JAOC	Joint Air Operations Center
JFACC	Joint Forces Air Component Commander
JFMCC	Joint Forces Maritime Component Commander
JP	Joint Publication
JSOAC	Joint Special Operations Air Component
JSOTF	Joint Special Operations Task Force
JTF	Joint Task Force
LCS	Littoral Combat Ship
LNO	Liaison Officer
LST	Tank Landing Ship
MARSOC	Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command

MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
NASOF	Naval Aviation Special Operations Force
NAVSPECWAR	Naval Special Warfare Command
NECC	Navy Expeditionary Combat Command
NSW	Navy Special Warfare
OEF	Operation ENDURING FREEDOM
OIF	Operation IRAQI FREEDOM
PBR	River Patrol Boat
ROC/POE	Required Operational Capability/Projected Operational Environment
SEAL	SEa, Air, and Land
SO	Special Operations
SOAR	Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment
SOCCENT	Special Operations Command Central
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOLE	Special Operations Liaison Element
SWCC	Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crewman
USSOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command

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